

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STAFF NOTE

Review Item:

Refocusing Secondary Education update

History/Background:

Existing Policy. The Kentucky Board of Education and the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) adopted the following goal for the Refocusing Secondary initiative: By 2014, every Kentucky student will persist to high school graduation and transition to further learning supported by a culture of high expectations and a plan of intentional focus that leads to success in learning, work and citizenship. In February 2006, the Board requested that an update of the Refocusing Secondary work be presented in August 2006.

In August 2004, the Kentucky Board of Education adopted the Conceptual Framework for Refocusing Secondary Education (Appendix A) to articulate the agenda for secondary reform in Kentucky. The Kentucky Department of Education introduced this Framework to identify the Why, What and How of securing better outcomes for all Kentucky students. The Framework functions to focus middle and high school work on the overall goals of:

- Zero Dropouts - Supporting every student to persist to graduation with a plan for transitioning to the next level of learning
- A Learning Guarantee - Ready every student to leave high school prepared to participate in the next level of learning without need for remediation; and,
- A Plan for Life - Providing every student with the opportunity to perform at high levels in a chosen field.

In Spring 2005, the Department invited districts that were ready to adopt the Conceptual Framework and begin implementation of key components to join in a statewide network. This network, called the Kentucky Secondary Schools Alliance, is a partnership between KDE and seventy-five high schools and their feeder middle schools. The goal of the Alliance is to mobilize the resources, knowledge, and capacities of the partners to shape policy, practice, and public engagement so that *all* Kentucky students leave high school prepared and ready to pursue a next level of learning. To ensure that Kentucky's work is connected to and informed by promising developments and proven practices beyond its borders, the state established a relationship with the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE). The ICLE, in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Gates Foundation, manages an ongoing initiative to identify schools around the nation that have been most successful in providing all students with a rigorous and relevant education. Other strategic partnerships have been formed with the Southern Region Education Board, the Education Trust, the American Diploma Project, and the National Governors Association's Improving America's High Schools Initiative. Participation in the Kentucky Secondary Schools Alliance continues to expand.

The Refocusing Secondary work has evolved within the Department into cross-agency initiatives that engage many programmatic areas of KDE. Through work with several external partners, KDE is rolling out the next phase of the Refocusing Secondary initiative. To reflect the fact that all districts are expected to move in this direction and that all who are not currently engaged must be, the initiative will be called from this time forward simply the “**Secondary Agenda**” (Appendix B).

The Secondary Agenda is a multi-faceted, multi-phase work plan that is designed to provide a clearer articulation of the goals of state policy, a coherent framework for state and local action, and a means to set goals and assess progress against the specific agenda for improving achievement. After the August Board meeting, the new Secondary Agenda will be released to local districts. KDE will issue a “Call to Action” inviting districts to confirm their participation in or commit for the first time to deep engagement in this work, thus reconstituting the Secondary Schools Alliance as the focus moves from awareness to implementation.

The Call to Action will form the basis for a compact between the local districts and KDE. More intensive supports and on-site technical assistance will be provided to the schools that are most deeply engaged in school transformation. The action plans that are developed locally will form the basis of the Comprehensive District and School Improvement Plan components impacting middle and high schools. In constructing these plans, districts will agree to establish benchmarks and indicators of progress against five essential principles. Each of these principles must be addressed and all are non-negotiable:

1. Every student is actively engaged in high quality, real world learning.
2. Every school creates personalized learning environments that provide students with support from adults toward the attainment of Individual Learning Plan goals.
3. Every educator collaborates in professional learning communities to increase internal capacity to provide high quality instruction and engaging learning experiences for every student.
4. Every student completes a standards-based curriculum that includes educational opportunities outside of the traditional high school experience as preparation for their postsecondary life.
5. Every leader organizes systems in response to student needs.

These schools will undergo an assessment against the principles to determine their status. From that point forward, progress will be measured in two ways: 1) through the collection of academic and non-academic indicator data; and 2) through surveys of students at particular points in time to determine whether their experiences are changing as the adults anticipated.

The Department’s role in this compact is to focus staff time and prioritize available resources on providing or making available the technical assistance and professional development that are needed by the Alliance schools. In preparation for this next phase of work, topics have been identified that are priority areas for professional development and technical assistance. Information about these topics and a developing 18-month plan to be

responsive to district and school needs is included as Appendix C. It is important to note that, while districts and schools share these common needs, they are in various stages of awareness and readiness for change. The Department will work with schools to design services that are differentiated so that learning communities of like-minded schools can develop to support one another. In this work, learning communities are expected to grow around geography, stages of readiness, and areas of special focus.

Going forward, progress and updates will be reported within the context of the five essential principles. Appendix D provides highlights of ongoing state-level activities and examples of local progress within this new context.

Future KBE Discussions

Recent Board actions, such as revision of the high school graduation requirements and the new policy to strengthen the Individual Learning Plan, laid a strong foundation on which to build the next phase of the secondary work. Therefore, the Department does not anticipate the need for Board action on numerous agenda items during the upcoming year. Listed below are the action items that are anticipated for the future:

- Comprehensive policy on dual credit
The Kentucky Board of Education directed that KDE establish an Interagency Task Force on Dual Credit to explore policy issues that impact the implementation of dual credit programs in the state. The Task Force is charged with bringing findings and recommendations to the KBE in April 2007.
- Quality in A5 and A6 instructional programs (alternative placements)
The Board directed that KDE enter into a contract with an external provider to conduct an analysis of the status and quality of instructional programs in A5 and A6 programs. The provider is to deliver findings and recommendations to the KBE in June 2007.
- Aligning teacher certification policy to promote expanded learning opportunity
Recent Board discussions have uncovered aspects of current policy on teacher certification that may be functioning as barriers to implementation of the Secondary Agenda. As an example, higher education faculty are not considered qualified to teach dual credit classes unless they hold secondary certification. The Education Professional Standards Board wishes to collaborate with the KDE to analyze current policy and determine if there is a need for revision.
- Implementation of alternative funding models for schools on performance-based credit systems
When the Board amended 704 KAR 3:305, Minimum High School Graduation Requirements, a provision was introduced for schools to implement schoolwide performance-based credit systems. Because the current SEEK formula uses calculations based on Average Daily Attendance, new policy will be needed to

govern implementation of these new models should any district pursue that option.

The Department will continue to provide general updates at the Board's request via review items and/or Board memoranda.

Impact on Getting to Proficiency:

The high school experience is not meaningful for every child. Therefore, comprehensive action research focused on the middle and high school experience as well as school and district efforts to provide opportunities for success for all students is critical.

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